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Prevention of armed conflict

Follow-up to the outcome of the Millennium Summit

Letter dated 11 January 2007 from the Chargé d'affaires a.i. of the Permanent Mission of Italy to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

I have the honour to transmit to you, on behalf of the Italian Presidency of the Inter-Parliamentary Union, the summary and main conclusions of the parliamentary hearing held on 13 and 14 November 2006 at United Nations Headquarters on the theme "Conflict prevention and peacebuilding: reinforcing the key role of the United Nations", which included contributions from parliamentarians with direct experience in conflict prevention and peacebuilding, together with United Nations officials and academics (see annex).

I should be grateful if you would circulate the present letter and its annex as a document of the General Assembly, under agenda items 11 and 113.

(*Signed*) Ambassador Aldo **Mantovani**
Chargé d'affaires a.i.

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Annex to the letter dated 11 January 2007 from the Chargé d'affaires a.i. of the Permanent Mission of Italy to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

[Original: English and French]

Conflict Prevention and Peacebuilding: Reinforcing the Key Role of the United Nations

Parliamentary Hearing at the United Nations
13–14 November 2006
United Nations, New York

Summary and Main Conclusions

The 2006 parliamentary hearing took place at United Nations headquarters in New York on 13 and 14 November and was attended by parliamentarians from some 47 countries and several regional parliaments. Representatives of Permanent Missions to the United Nations, as well as of intergovernmental and civil society organizations, also participated. The hearing comprised four sessions, including three interactive panel discussions which examined various aspects of the overarching theme "Conflict Prevention and Peacebuilding: Reinforcing the Key Role of the United Nations". Panellists included parliamentarians with direct experience in conflict prevention and peacebuilding, together with United Nations officials and academics. The fourth session was devoted to a discussion of the parliamentary dimension of the United Nations and how to enhance it.

Opening Remarks

Mr. Pier Ferdinando Casini, President of the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU), opened the hearing and welcomed the participants. He emphasized that, while there are still many conflicts smouldering in the world and many situations in which peace remain fragile, conflict is not inevitable. With political will and material support, conflict can be defused and countless lives can thus be spared. The international community must provide assistance for peacebuilding and conflict prevention. Doing so, he said, is not only a moral obligation, but also a matter of common sense because conflicts can spread to other countries within a region and beyond. Therefore, no conflict, whether big or small, can be ignored.

He noted that the United Nations has made significant strides in recent years in enhancing its ability to help prevent conflicts and build peace, particularly through the establishment of the new Peacebuilding Commission (PBC), the Human Rights Council and the United Nations Democracy Fund. The Organization has also renewed its efforts in the area of development with a view to tackling the poverty and social exclusion that are the root causes of much unrest. But experience has shown that the United Nations cannot act alone. It must have allies who can open new paths to dialogue and understanding and address sources of strife within fractured communities. Parliamentarians and political leaders, who are in direct touch with the people in their respective countries, are ideally placed to play that role.

The 2006 parliamentary hearing would afford an opportunity to explore how the United Nations and parliaments could support one another in conflict prevention and peacebuilding, he said, but the annual parliamentary hearing is just one example of the growing cooperation between the United Nations and the IPU. The two organizations are working together in virtually every field having to do with peace, democracy and development. In his view, democracy, coupled with development, is the best insurance against conflict and the best guarantee of lasting peace.

> ***We are here to learn from each other, and to figure out how the United Nations and parliaments can support each other when it comes to conflict prevention and peacebuilding.***
>
> Pier Ferdinando Casini,
> President of the IPU

He welcomed the adoption by the General Assembly of resolution 61/6, which calls for a leap forward in the way in which the United Nations and the IPU consult with each other, including formal recognition of the annual parliamentary hearings, and of other specialized parliamentary meetings held in the context of major United Nations meetings, as joint events. The resolution also calls for closer involvement of the IPU in the development of system-wide strategies for consideration by the United Nations system with a view to ensuring greater and more coherent support by parliaments for the work of the United Nations. That will help the two organizations to improve the coordination of their respective activities and enhance their mutual support. It will also facilitate the planning of future activities in the light of the recommendations emanating from the annual parliamentary hearings and other specialized parliamentary meetings. He concluded by saying that he looked forward to a frank and constructive discussion on the topic of conflict prevention and peacebuilding that would lead to strong recommendations both for the United Nations and for parliaments.

Ms. Haya Rashed Al Khalifa (Bahrain), President of the General Assembly, observed that the presence of so many parliamentarians from all over the world testified to the importance of the hearing. She recalled that during the 2005 World Summit, world leaders committed themselves to strengthening cooperation between the United Nations and national parliaments through the IPU. Such cooperation will lead to a better understanding of the consequences of international decisions on national realities, she said. In her view, nowhere is cooperation more important than in conflict prevention and peacebuilding, and she therefore welcomed the hearing's focus on strengthening the role of the United Nations in that area. She went on to note that several encouraging developments in relation to conflict prevention have taken place in recent years. One is the emergence within the Organization of a new culture of prevention, rather than reaction. The Organization also now has better tools for identifying and defusing potential conflicts, including an enhanced mediation role for the Secretary-General, a higher level of coordination within the United Nations system, stronger advocacy of human rights as the key to social harmony, and the commitment of States to protect their populations from genocide, war crimes and crimes against humanity. In addition, there is now greater recognition of the important role that women play in both the prevention and the resolution of conflicts.

In the latter connection, she stressed the importance of Security Council resolution 1325 (2000), on women and peace and security, and commended the Secretary-General for his efforts to strengthen gender mainstreaming in United Nations operational activities. She was pleased to announce that the General Assembly will hold an informal thematic debate on gender issues early in 2007. She called on parliamentarians to further efforts to mainstream women's issues and to increase their participation in the political process, including their access to elected office.

She believed that the newly established Peacebuilding Commission would provide a means of addressing issues that often led countries to fall back into conflict. She applauded the IPU for its assistance in one of the first cases being dealt with by the Commission, that of Burundi, and for its continued support for democratization as a means of promoting lasting peace and security. To achieve tangible results, all stakeholders in the peacebuilding process must work together closely in a real partnership that takes into consideration their

respective interests and contributions. Parliaments, she was convinced, have a significant role to play in that partnership.

Mr. Mark Malloch Brown (United Nations Deputy Secretary-General), delivering a statement on behalf of United Nations Secretary-General Kofi Annan, said that the Secretary-General welcomed the growing engagement of parliamentarians in the work of the United Nations and was especially pleased that the 2006 parliamentary hearing would focus on conflict prevention and the needs of countries emerging from conflict. One of the Secretary-General's objectives has been to move the United Nations from a culture of reaction to one of prevention, and a culture of prevention is indeed beginning to take hold in the Organization. A necessary complement to conflict prevention is peacebuilding. In establishing the new intergovernmental Peacebuilding Commission, the United Nations General Assembly and Security Council have created a dedicated institutional mechanism to address the special needs of countries emerging from conflict and enable them to find a durable path of reconciliation, development and peace. The challenge now is to make the most of that new capacity. Country ownership of peacebuilding is essential, and the role of national institutions such as parliaments is therefore crucial to success. As expressed in General Assembly resolution 61/6, the United Nations is committed to strengthening its partnership with parliaments and with the IPU in each of the core areas that make up peacebuilding.

Speaking on his own behalf, Mr. Malloch Brown noted that during the Secretary-General's time in office he has reached out to parliamentarians, civil society and business partners, reflecting his conviction that members of the executive branch of government alone cannot fully represent the views of "the peoples of the United Nations", in the opening words of the Charter of the United Nations. Under his leadership, the United Nations has also dramatically increased its role in peacekeeping. The Secretary-General has recognized, however, that peacekeeping must be supported by peacebuilding, and he therefore recommended the creation of the Peacebuilding Commission and the Peacebuilding Support Office. The Secretary-General's years in office have also seen the rise of terrorism as a threat to international peace and security and, along with Member States, he has established new mechanisms to address that threat. In addition, he has made development the centre of his personal agenda as Secretary-General because he recognizes that development is crucial to peacemaking – hence his leadership in the establishment of the Millennium Development Goals, which have transformed global development efforts. Perhaps his most signal contribution, however, has been in the area of human rights and democracy. He has brought human rights to the centre of intergovernmental activity because he realizes that there can be no development or security without respect for human rights. Mr. Malloch Brown concluded by saying that it has been a great pleasure for the Secretary-General and for him personally to work with parliamentarians and with IPU on all those issues.

Session I: Progress Report on the Prevention of Armed Conflict

Panellists: Mr. Bayo Ojo Minister of Justice of Nigeria; Ms. Angela Kane, United Nations Assistant Secretary-General for Political Affairs; and Ms. Elisabeth Rehn (Finland), former Special Rapporteur for Human Rights in Bosnia and Herzegovina and co-author of *Women, War and Peace: The Independent Experts' Assessment on the Impact of Armed Conflict on Women and Women's Role in Peace-building*

The discussion in this session centred around the recently released report of the United Nations Secretary-General on prevention of armed conflict (A/60/891), with the three panellists approaching the topic from distinct perspectives. Ms. Kane provided an overview on the current thinking on conflict prevention at the United Nations and offered some thoughts on how the United Nations and the IPU can best work together to prevent conflicts. Mr. Ojo cited a first-hand example of how dialogue and mediation can be used successfully to avert armed conflict, describing his experience in resolving a dispute between his country, Nigeria, and Cameroon over the Bakassi Peninsula. Ms. Rehn stressed the importance of women's role in preventing

conflict and building peace, drawing on her experience as an independent expert commissioned pursuant to Security Council resolution 1325 (2000) to study the impact of war on women and girls and the role of women in all aspects of peace processes. The main points of the panellists' presentations and their recommendations for action by parliamentarians are summarized below.

The core message of the Secretary-General's report is that although important conceptual, normative and institutional progress has been made on conflict prevention, much remains to be done in terms of concrete action. Over the last five years, US$ 18 billion has been spent on United Nations peacekeeping operations. If a fraction of that amount had been spent to prevent conflicts from erupting in the first place, countless lives and dollars could have been saved. In other words, more should be spent on the "soft" side of United Nations activities in order ultimately to spend less on "hard" activities such as military deployments. Preventing conflicts represents a dual challenge; it is necessary both to tackle the sources of stress and tension in States and societies – including poverty and social problems, poor governance and corruption, and inequitable development – and to make conflict resolution mechanisms stronger and more accessible. While sovereign States have the primary responsibility to prevent and resolve conflicts, they are not alone. The report encourages Member States to make better use of the support that the United Nations and other international institutions can provide.

> ***Neighbouring States do not have to resort to armed conflict to resolve disputes. Through good faith, political will and the commitment of political authorities, bloody conflicts can indeed be avoided. The international community, under the leadership of the United Nations, must now begin to be proactive in facilitating dialogue between disputing parties in order to prevent disputes from escalating into armed conflict. We must jettison the culture of reacting after the event and move to the culture of prevention.***
>
> Bayo Ojo, Minister of Justice of Nigeria

The Bakassi Peninsula case demonstrates that conflict prevention can work and provides an eloquent example of how countries can resolve disputes peacefully, utilizing the resources of the United Nations. Cameroon submitted the case to the International Court of Justice (ICJ) in 1994, after decades of friction between the Cameroonian and Nigerian Governments concerning sovereignty over the Peninsula. On 10 October 2002, the Court, based primarily on the Anglo-German Agreement of 11 March 1913, ruled that sovereignty over Bakassi lay with Cameroon, although 90 per cent of the population of the territory was Nigerian. The ICJ judgment generated considerable tension between the two countries and could have led to war. Nevertheless, at the invitation of Secretary-General Kofi Annan, the Presidents of the two countries met and agreed to set up a mixed commission under the aegis of the United Nations to seek practical and peaceful means of implementing the ICJ ruling. The commission met over a four-year period (2002-2006), culminating in the signing of an agreement on 12 June 2006, under which Nigeria agreed to cede the Bakassi Peninsula to Cameroon, thus bringing the longstanding dispute to a peaceful end and avoiding the loss of life that would inevitably have occurred had the dispute escalated into armed conflict.

Women's full involvement and equal participation in peace processes is a prerequisite for achieving and maintaining sustainable peace. Women and men experience armed conflict differently, and their needs and priorities with regard to peacebuilding will therefore also be different. The nature of armed conflict has changed in recent years. Whereas before, war involved mainly States fighting against other States, now groups within countries are fighting each other for power. Before, soldiers lost their lives on the battlefield; now, civilians are the principal victims. Moreover, the victims of such conflicts include not only those who are killed, but also those who are traumatized for life by rape and other forms of violence and abuse. Women and girls are especially vulnerable.

> ***Women's bodies have become the battlefield of fighting troops in the wars of today.***
>
> Elisabeth Rehn, Co-author of *Women, War and Peace: The Independent Experts' Assessment on the Impact of Armed Conflict on Women and Women's Role in Peace-building*

In this context, the importance of Security Council resolution 1325 (2000) cannot be emphasized enough. Unfortunately, there are still serious gaps in its implementation, in terms both of providing special protection for women and girls in wars and conflict situations and, especially, of enhancing their role in peace negotiations and in all aspects of peacebuilding. The international community has not set a good example for the involvement of women in post-conflict situations. The United Nations has not fulfilled its commitment to appoint more women to serve in high-level positions in peace operations. Member States, including their parliaments, share the blame for failing to grasp and stress the importance of the issue. Women have an important contribution to make to peacebuilding and reconstruction in countries emerging from conflict, and they should no longer be sidelined in the peace process. Women should be represented in peace negotiations and should be present in sufficient numbers in peacekeeping forces and in police and other security forces. The latter is particularly important given the reluctance of female crime victims in many cultures to confide in a male official.

Role of parliamentarians and of the IPU

Parliamentarians can help to further the implementation of Security Council resolution 1325 (2000) by pressing for the adoption of national action plans for that purpose, by encouraging the appointment of more women to senior posts and by ending impunity for all perpetrators of crimes against women in conflict situations.

In the field of conflict prevention, the United Nations and the IPU should build on their respective comparative advantages. In the case of the IPU, that advantage may stem from its members' close understanding of specific local, national and regional contexts and from the special relationships that they enjoy with the actors on the ground. As the direct representatives of their peoples, members of parliament have a pivotal role to play in hearing the voices of all people in society, ensuring that conflicts are resolved through dialogue and bringing all views to the negotiating table.

The IPU should pursue the development of more systematic and institutional relationships with the United Nations as a medium-term strategy. At the same time, it should continue its project-related collaboration with United Nations partners. The IPU is already active in many areas that fit into the broader conflict prevention agenda – for example, through its programmes and initiatives in the areas of good governance, democracy-building, crisis management and human rights promotion. It should continue and further develop those activities. The IPU should also use its strong advocacy role to advance the discussion of conflict prevention in parliaments around the world and to encourage the allocation of sufficient resources for that purpose.

In the discussion that followed the three presentations, participants expressed strong support for the move from a culture of reaction to one of prevention and for the involvement of women in conflict prevention and peacebuilding. A number of participants described their countries' efforts to prevent conflicts and promote dialogue and understanding at both the national and the regional levels. Several also mentioned their countries' participation in United Nations peacekeeping missions, which one delegate described as "the most tangible expression of any country's commitment to the prevention of armed conflict".

The following conclusions and recommendations emerged:

- While the move from peacemaking to conflict prevention is to be applauded, it must not become an excuse for failing to take action where it is necessary. "Soft" activities are essential and need to be promoted and supported, but they must not be allowed to obscure the equally essential role of "hard" activities in places such as Darfur. The tragedy of Rwanda should not be allowed to happen again.

> ***Let us make love not war, but when reaction to conflict is necessary, then let us react.***
>
> Douglas Gibson, Member of the National Assembly of South Africa

- To close the gap between rhetoric and reality, and to make the United Nations more effective and credible, a culture of prevention must be accompanied by a culture of implementation. That means, inter alia, implementing all United Nations resolutions. The question of Palestine is a case in point: many of the Security Council resolutions on the subject have never been implemented.

- When there is a mandate for action from the Security Council, resources can be released immediately. However, many countries are reluctant to bring their cases to the Security Council, which means that there is often not a formal mandate from Member States for mediation or good-offices activities, and the capacity of the United Nations for immediate intervention in conflict and post-conflict situations is therefore limited. It is to be hoped that Member States will support the Secretary-General's recommendation that a small percentage of the annual peacekeeping budget should be dedicated to conflict-prevention activities.

- Not only will conflict prevention save lives and money, it will help to further development efforts. A systemic approach that is tied to development and the reduction of poverty is needed in order to address the root causes of conflict. Policies on trade, development aid and the environment should be scrutinized to see how they affect conflict prevention. That is a task for parliamentary standing committees and for the IPU.

- The role of parliamentarians in conflict prevention goes beyond oversight of whether the executive branch has implemented effective policies for that purpose. As representatives of the people, parliamentarians have the ability to listen directly to the voices of those affected by conflict and to play a role in promoting constructive dialogue in order to resolve the underlying issues. The IPU is an important forum for parliamentarians to share a common understanding regarding conflict prevention and to address potential sources of conflict at the international level.

- The trafficking of small arms and light weapons and the proliferation of nuclear weapons are major contributors to tension within and between States, and both should be addressed as an integral part of conflict prevention and peacebuilding efforts. The IPU has made important contributions on both fronts, having dealt with the issue of small arms and light weapons at its 114th Assembly and with that of nuclear weapons at its 115th Assembly. Parliaments should push for an international consensus on nuclear non-proliferation and on the control of small arms and light weapons, including both legal and illegal weapons. The recent adoption of several resolutions on those topics by the First Committee of the United Nations General Assembly is an encouraging sign. It is to be hoped that the decision to begin the process of developing an arms trade treaty will conclude successfully in the establishment of a binding international instrument.

- The importance of involving regional organizations in peacebuilding efforts cannot be overstated. The international community, including the World Bank and the regional development banks, should give more support to regional cooperation. The revival of the Economic Community of the Great Lakes Countries, for example, will undoubtedly make it easier to control arms trafficking, trade in "blood diamonds" and other factors fuelling conflict in the region.

- It is important not to view women only as victims of conflict. Women serve as pillars of their families and communities in conflict situations and their leadership role should be recognized in peace processes, as should the unique contribution that women can make as peacebuilders. Both the United Nations and Member States should do more to implement Security Council resolution 1325 (2000).

- In cases of abuses committed against the local population by civilian peacekeeping personnel, the United Nations practises zero tolerance, but where peacekeeping troops are involved, the justice systems of the contributing countries must play the leading role. Parliaments need to put laws and rules in place to ensure that perpetrators from their countries are brought to justice.

- Similarly, the United Nations encourages the involvement of women in peacekeeping, but decisions regarding the composition of peacekeeping forces rest ultimately with countries. Parliamentarians should seek to influence the percentage of women included among the personnel their countries contribute to peacekeeping operations. Women parliamentarians should be particularly vigilant in exercising oversight of gender-related issues in peacekeeping and peacebuilding.

- Perhaps the single most useful tool in conflict prevention is education. If the values of peace are taught to schoolchildren from an early age, a large share of human suffering could be avoided.

Session II: The new United Nations Peacebuilding Commission (PBC) – Challenges and expectations

Panellists: Hon. Kolawolé A. Idji, President of the National Assembly of Benin; Hon. Alexander Graf Lambsdorff (Germany), Member of the European Parliament; and H.E. Mr. Ismael Abraão Gaspar Martins (Angola), Permanent Representative of Angola to the United Nations and Chairman of the Peacebuilding Commission

The discussion of the role of the United Nations and of parliaments in conflict prevention and peacebuilding continued during this session, focusing more specifically on the United Nations Peacebuilding Commission, established in December 2005. Mr. Idji spoke about the mandate and activities of the Commission in the broader framework of institutional change within the United Nations, highlighting the role of parliamentarians in mediation efforts aimed at preventing the eruption of armed conflict and in the restoration of peace and security in post-conflict situations. Mr. Martins presented an update on the status of the Commission's activities following its launch and the holding of the first two country-specific meetings on Burundi and on Sierra Leone. Mr. Lambsdorff outlined some expectations for the Peacebuilding Commission and presented the views of the European Parliament on various aspects of its work. The main points of the panellists' remarks are summarized below.

The creation of the Peacebuilding Commission and the Peacebuilding Support Office and the establishment of the Peacebuilding Fund mark a major step forward in the implementation of the institutional reforms needed to enable the United Nations to respond to the needs identified in the 2005 World Summit Outcome, notably the need for "a coordinated, coherent and integrated approach to post-conflict peacebuilding and reconciliation with a view to achieving sustainable peace, recognizing the need for a dedicated institutional mechanism to address the special needs of countries emerging from conflict towards recovery, reintegration and

reconstruction and to assist them in laying the foundation for sustainable development". The United Nations has thus taken decisive action towards an equitable sharing of responsibilities among countries in strengthening international peace and security, promoting human rights and achieving sustainable development. The task now is to ensure the optimal functioning of these new bodies. In particular, adequate financing must be provided for the activities of the Peacebuilding Commission. Funding for disarmament, demobilization and reintegration programmes in countries emerging from conflict is also essential if former fighters are to be successfully demobilized and peace restored.

> ***A demobilized combatant who has no hope of being able to survive and meet his essential needs is unlikely to want to give up his Kalashnikov. He will feel compelled to keep his weapon and continue fighting, thus fuelling war and insecurity.***
>
> Kolwolé Idji, President of the National Assembly of Benin

The work of the Commission appears to be off to a good start. Following its launch on 23 June 2006, two country-specific meetings, on Burundi and Sierra Leone, have been held and concrete areas of intervention have been selected. One of the expectations for the new Commission – that it get down to business as soon as possible – has thus been fulfilled.

The Governments of Burundi and Sierra Leone have been invited to develop strategies and plans for addressing the critical peacebuilding issues identified during the meetings. This task will be carried out by the Governments concerned with the assistance of the United Nations at the country level, reflecting the emphasis on country ownership that is a guiding principle of the Commission's work. The next step will be to shift the central work of peacebuilding to the field. To that end, the Government and the United Nations country team in each country, assisted by the Peacebuilding Support Office, are working together to narrow down the selected areas for concrete action by the Peacebuilding Commission and the international community.

To meet the challenge of effective peacebuilding, the Commission needs adequate resources. Approximately US$ 140 million has been contributed to the Peacebuilding Fund thus far, which is commendable, but that amount is insufficient when measured against the urgent needs in post-conflict countries. The Commission also needs an adequately staffed Peacebuilding Support Office. Arrangements for the staffing of the Office and the creation of suitable working conditions should be finalized as soon as possible to enable the Commission to respond to the increasing demands for results as its work proceeds.

As far as expectations for the Peacebuilding Commission are concerned, one is that it take a broad approach that brings together all relevant actors, including civil society. Another is that it provide strategic advice, but avoid micromanagement, leaving coordination at the operational level to the actors in the field. Nevertheless, the PBC should facilitate coordination of the activities of the various actors at the programming level; this is already occurring, for example, in the case of the European Union and the United Kingdom, which together are the largest contributors to Sierra Leone's recovery effort. It is also expected that the Commission will be efficient in its use of resources. This is a matter of particular concern for parliamentarians, as much of the funding for PBC activities will come from taxpayers in their respective countries.

With regard to the specific expectations of the European Parliament, it is prepared to support measures aimed, inter alia, at strengthening the rule of law at the national level and promoting democratic governance, participatory structures and pluralism in the political landscape. The European Parliament believes that it is very important always to take into account the regional dimension of instability, as instability in one country in a region affects the entire region. The gender issues involved in peacebuilding must also always be borne in mind. In the Parliament's view, an area in which the PBC can really add value is coordination of donors at the programming level in order to achieve a multidimensional approach to the socio-economic issues involved in peacebuilding. If those expectations are met, it is likely that the European Parliament will authorize funding for PBC activities. However, as long as the European Union is not included as a member of the Commission's

Organizational Committee, the Parliament will be hard-pressed to agree to a contribution to the Peacebuilding Fund.

As the voice of the people, parliaments occupy an important role in all fields of life, including the work of the Peacebuilding Commission. Parliaments and parliamentarians play a key part in the restoration of peace and security in the aftermath of a conflict. They can also be an important source of support for mediation and conciliation efforts aimed at preventing the eruption of or the relapse into armed conflict. Closer cooperation between the United Nations and the parliaments of the world could help render the Organization less vulnerable to the contingencies that often constrain its action. Such cooperation could prove especially beneficial in the area of conflict prevention and peacebuilding.

In the ensuing exchange of views between panellists and parliamentarians, the creation of the Peacebuilding Commission was welcomed as one of the most important developments in the recent history of the United Nations system, although some speakers expressed reservations about the lack of broader representation on its Organizing Committee and about the influence of the Security Council on the Commission's work, which one representative described as excessive. Participants stressed the need to provide adequate funding for the Commission's work through contributions to the Peacebuilding Fund. Adequate staffing of the Peacebuilding Support Office was also considered essential. Various representatives mentioned their countries' contributions to the Peacebuilding Fund. Several also highlighted national, regional and global peace-related initiatives in which their countries were involved, notably the Alliance of Civilizations initiative, co-sponsored by Turkey and Spain in conjunction with the United Nations Secretary-General, and a pilot project launched by Japan together with other Asian countries to train personnel for peacebuilding projects.

The following conclusions and recommendations emerged:

- The Peacebuilding Commission can only facilitate peace; it cannot build it. Peace can only be achieved by domestic actors. The Commission should serve as a forum for dialogue and cooperation between national actors and the international community. It can perhaps have the greatest impact as a coordinating body that leverages national and international resources. After the government in a post-conflict country has identified its peacebuilding priorities and strategies, the Commission should help to synchronize the plans of the national, regional and multilateral actors involved. This will make their respective programmes more effective and efficient, help to avoid duplication of effort and avoid misplaced emphasis on areas that may run counter to the government's priorities.

- Another key focus for the Commission should be preventing post-conflict societies from relapsing into conflict. This is an area in which the Commission can play a vanguard role. The process of constitution-building is an important aspect of preventing a return to violence. Indeed, the process is as important as the content of the new constitution. It must be an inclusive process that encompasses all parts of society.

- Rebuilding a post-conflict society means rebuilding the institutions that can mediate conflict – which occurs inevitably in any change process – in a peaceful, non-violent manner. Parliaments have a critical role to play in that regard. The parliament is the central institution of democracy and is absolutely necessary for the transition from armed conflict to peace. Parliaments ensure that decision-making processes are inclusive and representative of all interests in society, especially the interests and rights of women, minorities and vulnerable groups. Parliaments serve as the guardians of human rights and contribute to national dialogue and reconciliation at all levels.

- Unfortunately, the vital contribution of parliaments to peacebuilding has not been sufficiently understood, and in many peacebuilding processes, the executive branch remains the sole interlocutor of the international community. It is necessary to create a culture of parliamentarianism and to ensure a balance of power between the executive and legislative branches of government, without which a lasting peace cannot be achieved. The Peacebuilding Commission and the international community at large should provide strong support for the stabilization of some form of parliamentary representation in all post-conflict societies. Obviously, the IPU has a crucial role to play in supporting the Commission's work in this area.

> ***A democratically elected parliament is at the very centre of democracy-building and peacebuilding in any society. Creating and supporting a well-functioning representative national assembly should be a top priority for all countries, but especially for those in post-conflict situations. We expect the Peacebuilding Commission both to encourage and to support these processes.***
>
> Mr. Finn Martin Vallersnes, Member of the Storting (National Assembly) of Norway

- Social reconciliation and reintegration of former combatants into society is also crucial to the success of any peacebuilding process. Employment options must be provided for ex-combatants, and programmes to stop the illicit circulation of small arms and light weapons must be put in place. Here, too, parliaments and parliamentarians have an important role. Social reconciliation requires dialogue, and parliamentarians are professionals in dialogue.

- Better understanding between cultures is indispensable for global harmony. The creation of the Alliance of Civilizations to counter extremism and foster better relations between Muslim and Western societies is therefore a welcome development and one deserving of broad support.

- As a newly created body, the Peacebuilding Commission has an ideal opportunity to incorporate a gender dimension into its mandate and work right from the start. In keeping with Security Council resolution 1325 (2000), the Commission should seek to involve women in all aspects of the peacebuilding process.

- The Commission should also pay due attention to the regional and subregional dimensions of peacebuilding, seeking to reinforce regional organizations in their peacebuilding efforts and to utilize their expertise. Organizations such as APEC (Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation) and the Council of Europe can be valuable partners in the Commission's work.

- A high-level panel could perhaps be set up within the Peacebuilding Commission to cast a spotlight on its work, and to help bolster support for United Nations Secretary-General-elect Ban Ki-moon.

- Peacebuilding must be a key focus of the United Nations as a global institution, but it must also be a focus for each and every Member State of the United Nations. The United Nations cannot be asked to take responsibility for peacebuilding while individual Members continue to violate the principles of peace and negotiation on which the Organization is founded.

- Member States must not shy away from supporting peacebuilding operations in dangerous areas simply because they are politically unpopular. Stabilization and reconstruction of areas such as southern Afghanistan are vital to regional and global security. Conflict prevention and peacebuilding are segments in a process, and success at the end of that process demands commitment throughout. IPU members should take that important message to their respective houses of parliament.

Session III: Good governance and the fight against corruption – key tools in peacebuilding and conflict prevention

Panellists: Senator Rosario Green Macías, Mexico; Hon. John Williams (Canada), Member of Parliament and Chair of the Global Organization of Parliamentarians against Corruption (GOPAC); Prof. Susan Rose-Ackerman (Yale University), Board Member, Transparency International USA; Ms. Pippa Norris, Director, UNDP Democratic Governance Group; Hon. Rolando Alvarenga Argueta, Vice-President, Legislative Assembly of El Salvador

This session examined various aspects of governance and corruption and their relationship to conflict prevention and peacebuilding. Ms. Green Macías and Mr. Alvarenga Argueta shared some lessons learned from their countries' experience in fighting corruption. Ms. Rose-Ackerman spoke on the relationship between corruption and violence. Mr. Williams focused on the role of parliaments in combating corruption and promoting accountability and transparency in government. Ms. Norris suggested some practical steps that might be taken to strengthen democratic governance and reduce conflict and corruption. The panellists' remarks are summarized below.

Corruption is not only morally wrong, it depletes resources and it can lead to violence and unrest. Corruption diverts needed funds away from development programmes designed to address poverty and other social problems that are at the root of many conflicts. It can also pose a threat to democracy because a population exasperated with corruption among its leaders may, through democratic processes, elect an authoritarian government. When democracy is entwined with endemic corruption, elections themselves can give rise to corruption and violence. Nevertheless, corruption is not always associated with conflict. Indeed, in States with weak institutions, corruption may be what holds the system together and staves off violence. Hence, a system might appear to be working well because there is not much violence, but that does not necessarily mean that there is good governance.

The key to good governance is ensuring accountability, which can be defined as a force beyond one's control that causes one to think and act in a certain way. In a democracy, that force is the electorate. Leaders will deliver good governance when the people demand it and when there is a price to pay for failing to do so. If good governance is in place, the people will not tolerate the pillaging of State assets by their leaders. They will demand, and get, ethics, honesty and integrity in government. It is the responsibility of parliaments, as the institutionalized voice of the people, to hold their governments accountable. However, too often, parliamentarians are willing co-conspirators with the government and are quite happy to allow the government to pillage the country's assets as long as they get their share.

> ***If good governance is in place, leaders will be building their society, not their secret bank accounts.***
>
> John Williams, Member of Parliament, Canada, and Chair of GOPAC

Strategies for enhancing parliamentary capacity to exercise oversight and fight corruption include developing a parliamentary code of conduct and redefining parliamentary immunity to end impunity for parliamentarians who engage in corrupt practices; providing peer support for parliamentarians who are prepared to stand up for honesty, integrity and the rule of law; providing education and training for members of parliament in how to perform their oversight function; and persuading donor agencies to report directly to parliament on money given to the government and its intended uses. In addition, the existence of independent media, free from both government censorship and concentration in a few private hands, is crucial in order to expose corruption.

In countries emerging from conflict, the most effective way to reduce the potential for both corruption and further conflict is to put in place a constitution that provides for power-sharing at every level. Such a system affords the best checks and balances to ensure accountability, reduce malfeasance and increase transparency in government. Decentralization is also key, as local groups are best able to hold local politicians to account.

Corruption exists to some extent in all countries, including both developed and developing ones. It is a complex phenomenon, for which there is no universal solution. Nevertheless, there are certain measures that have proved effective in stemming corruption in El Salvador, Mexico and elsewhere. To avoid unleashing a violent counter-reaction where corruption is entrenched, it is best to start with small, simple steps, rather than attempting to introduce sweeping reforms, in order to achieve some early and visible victories. Effective anti-corruption measures include establishing independent bodies to monitor the activities of the public sector, setting up controls on tendering for public works, enacting anti-nepotism and other anti-corruption legislation, making recruitment to the public service more transparent, increasing citizens' access to government information and promoting a culture of zero tolerance for corruption.

International organizations such as the United Nations can assist countries by putting pressure on corrupt leaders to leave power; helping to reintegrate ex-combatants into society in a post-conflict situation; providing technical assistance to help countries create internal financial control systems and other anti-corruption measures; and monitoring and assessing anti-corruption initiatives under way around the world in order to identify best practices.

Ratification of the United Nations Convention against Corruption and other international anti-corruption agreements, while laudable, will not, in and of itself, guarantee less corruption. To have any effect, conventions have to be implemented. Similarly, the enactment of strong anti-corruption legislation is not sufficient; laws must be consistently enforced. To that end, the existence of a strong and independent judiciary is essential.

In the discussion that followed, many speakers described their countries' efforts to combat corruption, money-laundering and terrorism. Many also mentioned their countries' ratification of the United Nations Convention against Corruption and various regional anti-corruption conventions. One representative put forward the view that corruption is always a political phenomenon. Others disagreed, pointing out that corruption also occurs in the private sector. Some representatives felt that the capacity for corruption is inherent in human nature, which is why it occurs in all countries and has existed throughout history. Everyone agreed that combating corruption is a long-term undertaking which requires sustained political will. It was agreed, too, that corruption undermines the rule of law, threatens democracy and hinders development. There was also consensus on the value of sharing experiences and lessons learned in the battle against corruption, particularly among countries with similar levels of development. Numerous representatives underscored the need for strong laws and sanctions that would serve as effective deterrents to corruption and the importance of independent communications media to expose cases of corruption and help to ensure that perpetrators are brought to justice.

The following additional points were raised:

- Corruption can only be fought in a democracy because only in a democracy do the people have the power to remove corrupt politicians from office. In a democratic society, pluralism, checks and balances, and a free press are the principal weapons in the fight against corruption.

- As is true of peacebuilding, success in stemming corruption hinges on the leadership of domestic actors.

- Similarly, domestic actors must take the lead in ensuring good governance. What constitutes "good governance" must be determined bearing in mind the history and culture of each society and with due respect for the right of each country to pursue its own path to development. Good governance cannot be imposed from the outside.

- There are fundamental moral and ethical issues involved in both the fight against corruption and the effort to institute good governance. It is to be hoped that those issues will be examined by the first session of the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Convention against Corruption in December 2006.

- Participation of States from all regions of the world is a precondition for the effective implementation of the United Nations Convention against Corruption. All countries should be encouraged to ratify the Convention at the earliest possible date.

- Establishing sanctions for corruption only treats the symptoms of the problem. The real challenge is to eliminate the economic, social and other causes that give rise to corruption. It must also be recognized that corruption always involves two parties, the corrupted and the corruptors. The fight against corruption must target both. Prosecuting multinational companies that bribe public officials, for example, will send a strong signal to other would-be corruptors.

- One important measure that can be taken to prevent corruption is to ensure better salaries for public officials. They will thus be less susceptible to bribery and other forms of corruption.

- In addition, to discourage corruption, international donors and investors should exercise greater oversight of how and where their money is being spent by the recipient countries.

- Monopolies can be a form of corruption when producers set prices in a way that has nothing to do with production costs. A case in point is the oil monopolies and the unjustified rise in the price of oil, a commodity that is vital to development and the well-being of peoples.

- Training and education to promote a culture of honesty and integrity are critical elements in any campaign against corruption. Education targeting young people is especially important.

Session IV: Enhancing the parliamentary dimension of the United Nations

Panellists: Hon. Pier Ferdinando Casini, President of the IPU; Hon. Theo-Ben Gurirab, Speaker, National Assembly of Namibia

In this session, the two panellists discussed various aspects of the role of parliaments and parliamentarians vis-à-vis the United Nations. Mr. Casini reviewed the history of the IPU's interaction with the United Nations, which dates back to the founding of the latter. He noted that annual parliamentary hearings have been held at United Nations headquarters for some 20 years, but that only in the last 10 years has the IPU become truly proactive in giving structure and content to parliamentary interaction with the Organization. He drew attention to the declaration adopted on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of the United Nations (http://www.ipu.org/un-e/un50.htm#role), which lays out a vision for the role of parliaments in international cooperation. That vision, he said, remains valid today. He also referred to the IPU publication *Parliament and Democracy in the Twenty-first Century: A Guide to Good Practice* (http://www.ipu.org/PDF/publications/democracy_en.pdf), chapter 7 of which deals with parliamentary involvement in international affairs, particularly the parliamentary oversight function. He recalled that the definition of the parliamentary dimension of international cooperation and international relations had been further refined during the two world conferences of speakers of parliament held at United Nations headquarters in New York in 2000 and 2005.

Turning to the specific roles of the IPU, he said that, like the United Nations, it is a tool to facilitate cooperation between governments. The IPU can help stimulate reflection and facilitate action. It can help organize and channel parliamentary input into the United Nations. It can mobilize and provide assistance to parliaments in their dealings with the United Nations, look after their interests and help ensure that they are well informed of what is going on at the United Nations so that they are better placed to take action. The IPU is not a substitute for action by parliaments, however, it is a complement. In conclusion, he said that to enhance the parliamentary dimension of the United Nations, the IPU is considering the possibility of establishing a special committee on parliamentary relations with the United Nations, the aim being to form a body of parliamentarians who are

experts on the work of the United Nations and who can both keep IPU members informed of United Nations activities and provide input on and ensure oversight of those activities.

Mr. Gurirab highlighted the cooperation between the United Nations and the IPU in a variety of areas, including peace and security, economic and social development, international law, human rights, democracy and gender issues. He underlined the importance of the oversight role of the IPU and its part in ensuring accountability and transparency in the activities of the United Nations, but cautioned that the IPU should take care to ensure that it is not perceived to be competing with or duplicating the work of the United Nations. He pointed out that it is incumbent upon the IPU to exercise oversight and follow-up in the international arena, just as its member parliaments do in their respective countries. He also urged the IPU leadership to endeavour to persuade the United States of America to return to the IPU fold.

> **This worldwide parliamentary organization, the IPU, now 117 years old, is experiencing a reinvigorating rebirth of its vital mission and is now happily embracing a new and determined campaign for human development, human security and a prosperous world for all, especially the poor, the weak and the needy.**
>
> Theo-Ben Gurirab, Speaker of the National Assembly of Namibia

Opening the discussion, Mr. Casini invited participants to consider the following questions: What do you expect from the annual parliamentary hearings at the United Nations and how can they be improved? What specific new features would you like to see introduced in 2007? How do you see the relationship between the IPU and the United Nations five years from now? Should another conference of speakers of parliament be held? If so, when? In addition, he asked members to share examples of how they are working with the foreign affairs ministries and permanent missions of their respective countries to promote closer relations between the IPU and the United Nations.

In the discussion that followed, participants agreed on the mutual value of cooperation between the IPU and the United Nations, noting that it is parliaments that enable the concrete realization of many global initiatives that originate within the United Nations. It was pointed out, for example, that the Millennium Development Goals cannot be achieved without the collaboration of parliaments at the national level. And it is parliaments that enact the legislation that gives the international instruments adopted at the United Nations binding legal force and effect. At the same time, the United Nations, together with the IPU, can provide valuable assistance to strengthen the capacity of parliaments, particularly those in fledgling democracies and in countries emerging from conflict. Support was expressed for the creation of an IPU committee on parliamentary relations with the United Nations and for the establishment of a permanent mechanism for consultation and coordination between the two organizations through a supplementary administrative arrangement, as proposed by the Secretary-General in his report on cooperation between the United Nations and regional and other organizations (A/61/256).

The following conclusions emerged from the discussion:

- In the relationship between the United Nations and the IPU, more recognition should be given to the institution of parliament. The recent report of the Secretary-General on conflict prevention (A/60/891), for example, mentions the role of parliamentarians, but contains very few references to parliaments as institutions, despite their key role in reducing tensions and promoting dialogue to resolve conflicts at the national level.

- The United Nations should pursue more direct interaction with parliaments and parliamentarians. United Nations officials should be encouraged to meet, for example, with parliamentary foreign affairs committees. At the same time, parliamentarians should be included in United Nations task forces and missions, and their input should be sought on United Nations policy formulation.

- The reform processes under way within both the United Nations and the IPU affords a special opportunity to reflect upon how cooperation between the two organizations can be enhanced, particularly in the areas mentioned in General Assembly resolution 61/6.

The hearing concluded with the presentation of reports by the rapporteurs for the various sessions (available on the IPU website at http://www.ipu.org/splz-e/unga06/summary.pdf). Mr. Casini expressed satisfaction with the outcome of the deliberations and called upon parliaments to follow closely the work of the United Nations, be actively engaged in shaping a new IPU Plenary Committee on UN affairs, and contribute to planning for the Parliamentary Hearing at the United Nations in 2007.